

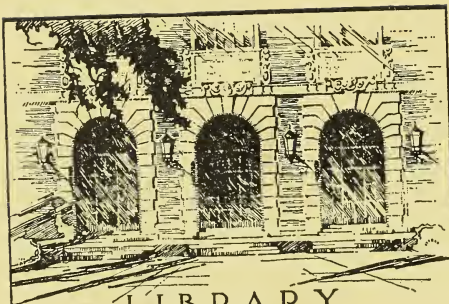
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LITTLE TURTLE, CHIEF
OF THE MIAMI (1751-1812)

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ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

1875


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CHIEF LITTLE TURTLE



Chief Little Turtle
1751 - July 14, 1812

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LITTLE TURTLE,
CHIEF OF THE MIAMI

Prepared by the Staff of the
Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County
1954

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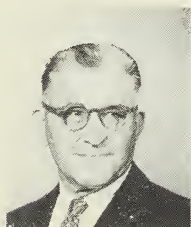
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Ind Hist Surv

The Indian tribes of every region of continental United States have produced great leaders. American history has been influenced, and American literature has been enriched by the exploits and achievements of these notable personalities. Dissimilar in culture and civilization to the white leaders who dispossessed them of their hunting preserves and killed or drove their people into exile, these native chiefs were endowed with a high order of intelligence and skill in statecraft and proved worthy foes to their white adversaries.

The following Indian chiefs have been regarded by many American historians as pre-eminent: Powhatan in Virginia, Massasoit of the Wampanoags in Massachusetts, Logan of the Mingo, Cornstalk of the Shawnees, Red Jacket of the Senecas, Black Hawk of the Sauk and Foxes, Joseph of the Nez Percés, Sitting Bull of the Sioux, Osceola of the Seminoles, and Geronimo of the Apaches. These leaders and numerous others directed the stubborn and often temporarily effective rear guard action of people at bay in their attempt to survive the annihilation which at times confronted them.

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The Indian population on the continent was sparse. A primitive people in the hunting and fishing stage of civilization, the Indians were a nomadic race; reliance upon hunting in the forest for their sustenance necessitated frequent changes of residence to ensure an adequate game supply. As the white man encroached from the East Coast, the Indian was driven westward. Every tribe and every area east of the Mississippi had its burden of displaced persons and fragments of alien tribes. Indian peoples differed greatly among themselves in culture, language, and customs. Indeed, they were probably as different from their neighbors as are the various European nationalities--Germans, French, Irish, Italians, and English.

The earliest white men who made contact with these Indian tribes were totally unfamiliar with the languages and customs of the red men. The conclusions and interpretations drawn by these invaders from their observations were often erroneous and illogical due to lack of information and scholarship as well as the prejudices engendered by the controlling religious and racial bias of the times. Certainly much of the white man's record about the Indians, their tribal divisions, and the personalities of their leaders

is contradictory and incomplete.

On the other hand, certain historical facts about the Indian leadership of our own region when it was the frontier of civilization have been established. Prominent Indian leaders, whose abilities contemporary whites realized and respected, moved across the scene in the Old Northwest during the second half of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth century. These Indian statesmen wielded great influence throughout the area forming present-day Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and southern Canada. Sometimes their activities extended into the country now known as Minnesota, western New York, and Kentucky; occasionally these leaders were potent factors even in areas as far distant as the present-day states of Tennessee and Alabama.

These Indian patriots were closely connected with the white settlement at the confluence of the St. Mary's River and the St. Joseph River. The site had been from time immemorial a center of political and economic activity. General Wayne noted that the agricultural development along the Maumee River was equal to any that he had ever observed elsewhere. Even though these copper-skinned chiefs were frequently engaged in frontier politics and warfare far from the neighborhood of the three rivers, they are an integral part of the history of our Fort Wayne.

It is with admiration, respect, pride, and a sense of history that we drop this petal of memory upon the graves of Pontiac, the Prophet, Little Turtle, Bukongehelas, Blue Jacket, and Tecumseh. They were regarded by their race as an aristocracy of intelligence at least as important as that of Harmar, St. Clair, Wayne, and Harrison by the white race.

Of all these leaders, Little Turtle's influence was most potent locally. The annals of the past record his name and career among the illustrious. Although established biographical data is scanty, still, there is enough to indicate the primacy of his genius and ability both in battle and at the council fire.

Little Turtle (Michikinikwa or Me-she-kin-no-quah) was born at his village on Eel River in 1752. His mother was a Mahican and his father a Miami chief, but the Miami custom of tracing descent through the female line denied him any hereditary advantage from his paternal line. His capabilities were outstanding and were so recognized by his fellows. As a very young man he was tall

and sour of expression and disposition; he was crafty both in council and on the field of battle.

Very early he fell under British influence; he aided them against the American forces during the Revolution. This was the beginning of a distinguished military career lasting twenty years. Little Turtle participated in the La Balme Massacre in 1780; he led the victorious forces which inflicted defeat upon the American General Harmar at the Battle of Harmar's Ford in 1790; and he commanded the Indian allies who defeated General Arthur St. Clair in 1791. General Anthony Wayne found Little Turtle a worthy foe; the latter directed Indian attacks and skirmishes against Wayne's forces as they advanced northward from Cincinnati; he led the attack on General Wayne's army at the second Battle of Fort Recovery. These are the highlights of a long, eventful, and on the whole, a highly successful military career. Probably the most important military responsibility entrusted to Little Turtle by his people was as commander in chief on the occasion of the defeat of General Harmar.

After St. Clair's defeat at Fort Recovery, Little Turtle seems to have had misgivings as to the probability of any future Indian successes. His observation of the superior tactics and prudential course of General Wayne convinced him that the Indian cause was now definitely in jeopardy.

An episode in the private life of the Miami chief now set in motion certain forces which were to weaken his power over his own people. William Wells, a white child, at the age of twelve years, had been kidnapped by the Miami and conveyed from his home in Kentucky to Kekionga. He was formally adopted into the tribe and married the daughter of Little Turtle. He participated in various Indian attacks on Americans, but when Wayne advanced into the Indian country, Wells had a revulsion of feeling regarding his association with the Indians against his own race. He now determined to abandon his Indian wife and children and offer his services to Wayne. Bidding farewell to his father-in-law he said: "We have long been friends; we are friends yet, until the sun stands so high (indicating the place) in the heavens; from that time we are enemies and may kill one another." Wayne received him gladly and appointed him chief of scouts. The incident was an additional factor in the depression of Little Turtle's spirits.

After establishing winter quarters at Fort Greenville and erecting and garrisoning Fort Recovery, Wayne invited the Indian chiefs to Fort Greenville for a parley. Little Turtle, Blue Jacket, Bukongehelas, and other chiefs met to discuss the invitation and to formulate policy; they gathered before a campfire at night for their conference. Little Turtle strongly advocated the proposed meeting with Wayne and gave emphatic expression to his viewpoint. He stood before his associates in front of the council fire with his "foot-long ear rings" luridly swinging with each motion of his head; as he spoke the firelight caught the gleam of three huge nose jewels. His imposing physical presence was supported by a reputation for a long series of military successes. He sought to convince his fellow chiefs that their victories over the whites could not always continue and were now likely to be reversed. He said: "We have beaten them twice under separate commanders. We cannot expect the same good fortune always to attend us. The Americans are now led by a Chief who never sleeps; night and day are alike to him. Notwithstanding the watchfulness of our young men, we have never been able to surprise him. Think well of this. There is something that whispers to me, it would be prudent to listen to his offers of peace." Bukongehelas, mature and seasoned, supported Little Turtle's counsel.

Chief Blue Jacket, much younger and little experienced in war, rash in council, and unimpressed by the cautious counsel of his elders, turned truculently upon Little Turtle. He charged the elder chief with cowardice, treachery, and self-interest and denounced him to the others. The young warrior referred to the fact that William Wells, an adopted white man, and son-in-law of Little Turtle, had become chief of Wayne's scouts. Blue Jacket said: "Wayne's money had bought Little Turtle's heart." The charge effectually silenced Little Turtle, and the view of Chief Blue Jacket prevailed among the other chiefs. Accordingly, Wayne's olive branch was refused.

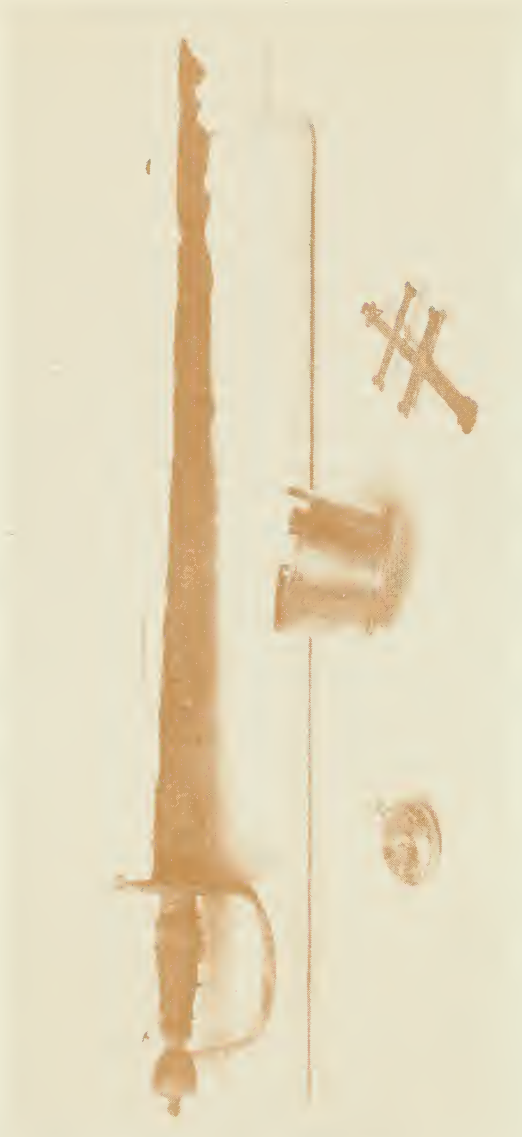
The pacific advice of Little Turtle seems to have undermined his influence with his own people. Thenceforth, more and more they regarded him as an appeaser and a friend of the whites; nevertheless, he lived among the Miami until the end of his life. After the attack on Wayne's forces at Fort Recovery in 1794, Little Turtle patriotically attempted to dissuade the Indian allies from

distant points from abandoning the war with Wayne, but was unsuccessful. They returned to their far-off homes, and thereafter the Indian forces which faced General Wayne were chiefly drawn from the immediate locality. At the Battle of Fallen Timbers, Little Turtle was in command of Indian sharpshooters, but he was not commander in chief of Indian forces--another evidence of the suspicion and distrust of his own tribe.

In the conferences between Wayne and the Indian chiefs following the Battle of Fallen Timbers, Little Turtle seems to have regained some of his former importance. He served his people well with those talents for which he was recognized--eloquent oratory and crafty diplomacy. Little Turtle hoped to salvage something from the defeat at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, and he was unprepared for the stiff terms demanded of the Indians. The demands of Wayne were inexorable. Among other stipulations he proposed a new boundary between the whites and the Indians by drawing a straight line from Fort Recovery to the confluence of the Kentucky and Ohio rivers. Little Turtle at first demurred because it would deprive the Indians of their prized hunting grounds in the White Water Valley. Wayne, on his part, probably realized that this was a fertile area and of great future agricultural value; he, therefore, insisted on settlement on his own terms. Little Turtle, a realist, wisely acquiesced in the end. He knew that Wayne's diplomacy stemmed from the strength inherent in his recent military success as well as from his present military strength. The Battle of Fallen Timbers had given Wayne the upper hand, and should the war be renewed, Little Turtle's people would suffer still more. He counseled the acceptance of the hard terms imposed by the conqueror. Little Turtle's signature is on the Treaty of Greeneville and several other successive treaties.

Wayne recognized in Little Turtle a contentious and intelligent personality, albeit one with great potentialities for mischief. He shrewdly ordered that a mansion be constructed for Little Turtle, well within range of the guns of Fort Wayne.

In common with Pontiac, Tecumseh, and Blue Jacket, Little Turtle vigorously opposed the introduction of the white man's civilization with its arts, customs, and foreign values into the life of the Indians. He believed and argued that the Great Spirit had provided each race of his creation with the arts peculiar to its needs.



Relics found in the grave of Little Turtle
(see explanatory notes on opposite page)

EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. Sword.
Griswold--Pictorial History of Fort Wayne, pp. 196-197, Note 4 (excerpt).
"In one spot was found a collection of silver crosses and dishes, but the most interesting specimen was a sword which, it is believed, was the identical weapon that George Washington gave to Chief Little Turtle on the occasion of his visit to the President."
2. Cross.
The cross (according to Mrs. Rawles, museum curator) is not a Jesuit cross, but a patriarchal cross. It is stamped with the initials "RC," those of Robert Cruickshank, Montreal silversmith.
3. Leg band (according to Mrs. Rawles).
The leg band is from the grave and is initialed "RC."
4. Watch.
The watch having a solid gold case was presented to the museum by the heirs of William Geake. According to tradition this watch was given to Little Turtle by the British. The Godfrey family became its owners for several generations and then passed it on to Mr. Geake (according to Mrs. Rawles).

Relics are housed in the Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society Museum; photography is by A. Subzda.

He argued that the contact of the Indian with the white man would result in additional creature wants which could only be satisfied by making the Indian dependent upon the white. The savage freedom of his people, he thought, was a greater treasure than any material comforts secured from the whites.

Nevertheless, Little Turtle was granted an annuity by the American government for services rendered to General William Henry Harrison in his negotiations with the Indians of the area after 1800. While General Harrison was not satisfied with these services, the record shows that Little Turtle's annuity was increased in 1805 by \$50 plus the gift of a negro slave. Incidentally, this is the only known record of negro slavery in Allen County.

During the last decade of his life Little Turtle lost most of his power and influence with his people. In this same period, his fame among Americans became legendary, and he was acclaimed a popular Indian hero. On an expense account provided by the federal government, he visited a number of eastern cities of the young republic. As early as 1797 he visited President Washington at Philadelphia and was presented with an ornate sword. In interviews with the French philosopher, Volney, Little Turtle explained the practices of the Indians; he also aided Volney in the compilation of a vocabulary of Indian words. General Kosciusko, the great Polish patriot and leader of the American Revolution, presented him with a pair of elegantly mounted pistols.

When Tecumseh's Conspiracy became a menace to American power in the Fort Wayne area, Little Turtle succeeded in dissuading the Miami from participating, and thus prevented much further bloodshed. After a brief residence near Fort Wayne, Little Turtle returned to his native village some twenty miles from the city on the Eel River where the United States government built a home for him. He visited Fort Wayne frequently and received medical aid from the American Army surgeon at the Fort. His last years were burdened by frequent attacks of gout, and he passed on to the happy hunting grounds in 1812. His native village was still in existence at that time.

One of Little Turtle's greatest contributions toward the civilization of his people was that of inducing the Miami Indians to abandon the rites and practice of human sacrifice. In recent years his grave was opened; all the artifacts interred with him were

removed and placed on exhibit at the local museum of the Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society. Among these precious relics is the ornamental sword given Little Turtle by President Washington.



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